

VIII

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B R I E E and P R A C T I C A L  
D I S C O U R S E  
O F  
A B S T I N E N C E

In Time of  
L E N T.

Wherein is shewed  
The popular MISTAKE and ABUSE of the  
Word

S U P E R S T I T I O N.

Preached at the Cathedral of St. PATRICK DUBLIN  
on *Ashwednesday* March 1. 1687.

B Y

PETER MANBY Dean of DERRY



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BRIEF and PRACTICAL

DISCOURSE

OF

ABSTINENCE

In Time of

L E N T

Wherem is showed

The popular Misuse and Abuse of the

Word

SUPERSTITION

Preached at the Cathedral of St. PATRICK DUBLIN

on Sabbath day the 1st of

1792

PETER MANNING D.D. Dean of DUBLIN

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follow M.DCCXCII

**A brief and practical Discourse of ABSTINENCE  
in time of LENT.**

*Matth. 4. 2.  
And when he had fasted Forty Days and Forty Nights  
he was afterwards an hungred.*

**N**ot to trouble you with any needless enquiries into this mysterious Fast of our blessed Saviour; I shall treat of it no other-wise than as matter of example to us, and shall endeavour only these two things,

First. To evidence our obligation to the Virtue of *Abstinence*; especially at this time, so solemnly observ'd by the Christian Church ever since the Apostles days.

Secondly. I shall recommend it from the consideration of those good Fruits and Benefits that result from it.

As to the first; if *Abstinence* be a Christian duty, the neglect of it must be our sin, and whether

ther we be obliged to it or no, we may soon be advised by the many precepts and examples both of the old and new Testament.

It hath been observed long since, that God was pleased to impose on *Adam* in Paradise only one Precept, and that was *Abstinence*; of the tree of knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat; for in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely dye, Gen. 2. 17. if in the state of innocence we ought to abstain, much more in this state of our corruption.

Examples of the old Testament are not a few, as of *Esther*, *Nehemias*, *Ahab*, the *Ninevites*, of *David*, *Psal. 69. I wept and chastened my Soul with Fasting.* Upon these I shall not insist, lest possibly some may imagine them not so obligatory to us Christians: but I shall manifest it out of the new Testament.

Our blessed Saviour enjoyns it, *Matt. 6. 17. But thou when thou fastest, anoint thy Head and wash thy Face, that thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.* Here he establishes the duty in prescribing the manner how we ought to perform it; as in the same Chapter he advises concerning Prayer and Almsgiving; *when thou prayest and when thou givest thine Alms, be not as the*  
*Hypo-*



*Hypocrites are, &c.* presupposing and establishing all these Duties, while he directs us in the manner of them.

Likewise he confirms it *Matt. 9. 15.* *Jesus said unto them, can the Children of the Bridechamber fast, so long as the Bridegroom is with them; but the days shall come when the Bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast; that is, this vertue of Fasting will be more seasonable after my Death, and then shall it be practised by my Followers. And accordingly 'twas verified in the practice of the Apostles, and first Christians, immediately after his Ascension, as we read Acts 13. 3.*

Again, the Evangelist *St. Luke* records it, to the perpetual commendation of *Anna* the Daughter of *Phanuel*, that she was a Widow of about *Fourscore and Four* years, and departed not from the Temple, but served God with Fasting, and Prayers night and day. Nay our blessed Saviour recommends as a means of expelling the Devil, and consequently all naughty suggestions of the Devil, *Matt. 17. 21.* *Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by Prayer and Fasting.*

Lastly, *St. Paul* instructing the *Corinthians* about Conjugal Duties, *1 Cor. 7.* advyleth them, *Defraud not one the other, except it be for a time, that you may*

may give your selves to Fasting and Prayer: to all which I shall add, that Divines in their Bodies of Divinity do all teach the necessity of this Duty, even our Dissenters themselves, though they find fault with it in us, can yet appoint their own times of Abstinence, and impose them too, when they think good.

The Application of this Doctrine concerns two sorts of Persons, First the ignorant who have need to be inform'd; Secondly such as confess it their duty, but never practise it. The former I hope may see their mistake of supposing it rather a Popish than Christian duty. The later I wish may remember our Saviours words *Luke 12. 47. The Servant which knew his Lords will, and did it not, shall be beaten with many stripes.*

And now I consider that it is our Duty especially at this time, so universally observed by the Christian Church ever since the Apostles days.

Whosoever shall desire to inform himself concerning the original of the *Quadragesimal Fast*, will find the chief reason to have been the Imitation of our blessed Saviours Example: though other reasons be not wanting;

As the preparing our selves by a solemn Abstinence of Forty days for the Reception of the blessed

bleſſed Sacrament at *Eaſter*; whereunto the Chriſtians of all ages (excepting thoſe of phanatical Humours) have thought themſelves obliged; which reaſon is given by St. *Hieron* in his Comment on *Matt. 5*. The want of a pious diſpoſition and preparation before our religious duties of Prayer and receiving the holy Sacrament, is perhaps the reaſon that we are ſo little the better for them.

Another reaſon is, that the quadrageſimal ſeaſon is much about a tenth part of the year. That God hath commanded the Tenth of all things to be devoted to his Service; that while nine parts are allowed to our ſelves, we ought to dedicate a *Tenth* of our days to ſome more than ordinary recollection of our ſelves and repentance towards God.

But ſome will needs refer the Inſtitution of Lent to politique reaſons only: though it be too antient to have been inſtituted upon any ſuch account. The primitive Church doubtleſs intended Devotion, not Policy, in her ſolemnities of it: and the ſame our Church intends now. To obſerve a time of Abſtinence upon prudential or politick reaſons only, were no faſting for Religion; and it is to be remembred, that the Abet-  
tors

of this *judicial* Opinion are not very famous for any Religion.

That it was first observed in commemoration of our blessed Saviours Forty days Fast, *St. Austin* affirms; *Quadragesima auctoritatem habet ex Evangelio, quia totidem diebus Dominus jejunavit.* And *St. Hieron* writing on the 58th. Chapter of *Isaiah* saith, *Dominus quadraginta diebus in solitudine jejunavit, ut nobis solennes jejuniorum dies relinqueret.* Our blessed Saviour fasted Forty days in the Wilderness, that he might leave us a solemn opportunity of fasting. And long before *St. Hieron*s days, *Ignatius* the Disciple of *S. John* hath left his Opinion, that this time is to be observed by Christians in memory of our Saviours Forty days Abstinence. And were it not very ancient, our Church could not have thought her self obliged to the observance of it.

After its being thus attested by the ancient Fathers, we find it thus censured by *Mr. Calvin* in the 4th. Book of his *Institutions*; *Mera stultitia fuit jejunium quadragesimale ad Christi imitationem instituer.* It was meer Folly and Superstition (saith he) to pretend to observe *Lent* in imitation of Christs Forty days Fast; and he gives this reason for it; Christ abstained Forty days, not that he might leave

leave us an example of the like Fasting, which was impossible for us; but that he might manifest himself a *person* above the common condition of mortals.

This *Opinion* and this *Reason* he thinks fit to advance against the sence of the antient *Church*; and let us consider it a little, it being all that the Adversary has to say in this matter.

And first, it cannot be denied that our Saviours Forty days Fast and Temptation in the Wilderness was a part of that humiliation and those sufferings he underwent for our sins. He suffered for us (saith St. Peter) leaving us an example that we might follow his steps. He was not only our Redeemer by his Sufferings, but our Teacher by his Example; and if it be answered, that his Forty days Fast was too miraculous to be exemplary to us; we may soon satisfy our selves, that the reason of all Christs Miracles was to be beneficial to mankind; and what benefit could be intended or reason assigned for that miracle of Abstinence, unless this of being *exemplary* to us? to amuse the world with *wonders* was not the design of our blessed Saviour, but to do good.

Christ abstained as became him; we must imitate him according to the strength of our Frailty.

B

We



We follow his steps while we undergo what we can: we cannot sustain those extremities that he did; but to do what we can is ever acceptable to him.

Nay further, were this Abstinence only a Free-will Offering of the Church, the Psalmist will encourage it Psal. 110. 3. *In the day of thy power shall the people offer thee free-will offerings.* Under the Law (we know) the more voluntary the Devotion, the more accepted it was; provided there were no repugnancy to any Divine Precept. And it is so now under the Gospel; as may appear by this one observable instance Matt. 26. 12. *There came unto our Saviour a Woman having an Alabaster box of Ointment, who poured it on his Head as he sat at meat; which when the Disciples saw, they had indignation, saying, to what purpose is all this wast? But Jesus said, why trouble ye the Woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me: verily I say unto you, wheresoever the Gospel shall be preached in the whole world, this deed shall be told for a memorial of her.* That Free-will Offering which the Disciples rejected as an impertinency or Superstition in this Woman, our blessed Saviour commends as an expression of Devotion. Let us beware of that popular impiety of calling every thing Superstition that we do not understand.

And

And here perhaps it may not be impertinent to digress a few words concerning *Superstition*; which is a word, about the true meaning whereof the people are generally very ignorant, or very confused.

Let us therefore consider 1. what is meant by it in Scripture: 2. What it signified among the ancient Pagans. 3. How 'tis taken at this day among Christians.

First in Scripture meaning, the word *Superstition*, which we render *Superstition*, signifies *superfluous Worship* given to *Demons* or *Pagan Idols*: for instance, *I hate those that hold of superfluous Vanities* (saith the Psalmist,) *but my trust is in the Lord* Psal. 31. where by *superfluous Vanities* he means the *Pagan Deities*, which in the old Prophets are usually styled *Vanities*; *my people have burnt Incense to Vanity*, saith the Prophet *Jeremy*, 18. 15. Again *Saint Paul*, *Acts* 17. preaching to the *Athenians*, saith, *Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superfluous*; so our *English Translation* reads, but in the *Greek* 'tis otherwise: *Ye men of Athens I perceive ye are very much addicted to the Religion of Demons or false Gods*. That this was his meaning, appears evidently by the 16th. Vers. of that Chapter; the words are these, *While he*

carried at Athens, his spirit was stirred up in him, when he saw the City wholly given to Idolatry.

The word *Superstition* is not often met with in Scripture, and among those few places there are none where it signifies ought but either Religion in general, or else the Religion of Demons, or men deified after their death; such were Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Mercury, &c.

2. Among the antient Pagans 'twas a word (as to them) of no ill meaning; but us'd by the most (except Atheists and Epicureans) to signify Religion in a good sence. It was the most common word to express Religion in general, as the learned Dr. Hammond demonstrates by many instances in his *Treat of Superstition*, to which I refer the Reader: but the Epicureans by way of contempt were wont to term it Superstition, to fancy any Rewards or Punishments after this life; and Atheists would call it Superstition to be afraid of invisible powers, or to think that in nature there is any thing just or unjust but only by Law or Custom.

3. At this day among Christians 'tis thrown as a word of reproach or defamation on every Devotion we don't fancy. Thus to observe any special Devotion or Abstinence at this time is impiously call'd *Superstition*: to bow at the blessed name of

Jesus,

*Jesus*, to kneel at the holy Sacrament of *Christ's* Body and Blood, to bestow any *Ornament* on the House of God, or observe any external reverence there, is atheistically call'd Superstition. Thus Dissenters will needs pervert this word from its original and scriptural meaning. To worship the true God by a *Liturgy* must be Superstition; tho there be scarcely a Sentence in our Morning or Evening Service, that is not *verbatim* out of the holy Scriptures; which no man can say of their *Prayers*.

Again, to swear by a Book, to baptise Infants, or sing *Psalms* must be Superstition, say the Millenaries, Anabaptists and Quakers; persons no less sober in their Morals and conversant in the Scriptures than any Presbyterians whatsoever.

O but to worship the true God in a false manner, is not that Superstition? I answer, what do they mean by false manner? They mean doubtless all other ways except their own; and that is a fond conceit. Good God! where do the Scriptures tell us, that to pray by the *spirit* is to pray *extempore*? do they not tell us, that to pray by the *spirit* is to pray in an unknown tongue? *I will pray by the spirit* (saith St. Paul) *and I will pray with understanding also; if I pray in an unknown tongue my Spirit prayeth, but my Understanding is unfruitful.* 1 Cor. 14. 15.

But

But humane Inventions (say they) are prohibited in Gods service; not considering in the meanwhile, that all their own Prayers and manner of Worship are in the opinion of all Christians (except themselves) purely the issues of their own invention. For truly their extempore Prayers (which they call serving of God in spirit and in truth) are either humane Inventions, or divine Inspirations, or a mixture of both: if they are humane Inventions, then are they no better in their own nature, than the *Litany* of our Church, which they reject upon that account: if they are divine Inspirations, then are they as much the Word of God as any of *David's* Psalms, or as any part of the Bible; and being written from their mouths may become Canonical Scripture: if they are a compound of both, still they mingle their own Inventions with Gods Worship. I wish they would do us or themselves the kindness to answer this.

What intelligent unprejudiced man sees not, that in our Churches *Litany*, nay in one of her *Collects* there is more of Substance and Instruction than in a million of their extempore effusions.

I conclude that Superstition (as some people misunderstand and misapply the Word) is so far from



from being a Sin, that it may be highly pleasing and acceptable to God.

It is time that I proceed to the second Head, namely, what are those good Fruits and Benefits that result from the Virtue of *Abstinence*.

And the first is a subduing the extravagancies of our *Flesh*. We may as well hope to be cured of a Drop sic by continual drinking, as expect to moderate the Fire of Lusts without substrating the Jewell. They that live after the flesh shall dye, is the frequent voice of Scripture; and every good man will take notice of it; but it is not possible for the man to live otherwise, who takes all opportunities to inflame himself by Drink or idle Company. Beasts are not cured of their ill Conditions by being pamper'd.

Whilst we can deny nothing to our Appetites, no marvel if we suffer those inconveniencies that render our Lives more unhappy than that of the Brutes. Refraining our selves is but necessary to the Happiness of this present life, as well as to that of a better. *Abstinence* hath been the practice of good men in all Ages for the defeating of Temptations and preventing the Vices of deprav'd nature.

But some may say, I have tryed, but am not

so happy as to find any such effect of it; I answer, it can hardly be, if thou art in earnest; joyning thy Prayers and sincere endeavours, not being a *traitor* to thy self.

A second Advantage is, to assist us in our Prayers by subtracting from the nourishment of those *desires* that would otherwise trouble our good thoughts: especially it will suggest to us this reflection, what crazy and tottering *Tabernacles* our Bodies are, unless upheld every day by the supplies of Food and Nourishment. Indeed our trouble and sorrow for our sins can scarce be real without it. *Jejuna quia peccasti; Fast* because thou hast sinned, in a pious revenge upon thy self, in a real abhorrence of thy sin.

If the Heart be unfeignedly discontented for sin, it will assuredly give some outward evidence of it by way of *pennance*: and he that never abstains at all, may justly suspect the reality of his Repentance.

3. Through the merits of *Christ*, it is a means to conciliate the Favour of God and Forgiveness of our sins. Upon the preaching of *Jonas* the people of *Nineveh* believed and proclaimed a *Fast*; and the King of *Nineveh* said, *Let every one turn from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.*

*hands, Jonah 3. 7. and then follows (vers. 10.) God saw their works and repented of the evil that he had said he would do unto them.*

Nay God was pleased to take so much notice of *Ahabs* hypocritical Fast, as to spare his Kingdom until the Reign of his Successor. *And it came to pass that Ahab fasted and lay in Sackcloth, and the Word of the Lord came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself before me; I will not bring the evil in his days, but in his Sons days. I will bring the evil.*

To conclude this matter, with a few particular Directions.

When we *fast*, let us do it cheerfully, not Pharisaeically with a sad countenance: let us do it with respect unto God and not unto men; knowing that of him we shall receive *the Reward of the Inheritance.*

Let every Christian limit himself according to his strength, abstaining between the two extreams of too much Indulgence and too much Severity; giving to the poor and distressed people the quantity or value of that Diet from which he abstains.

I know it is objected by some, that the *Clergy* themselves are not exemplary to us in this matter. But although this were true, it is certainly no excuse

cuse for you or me: 'tis as much as to say, thou wilt not go to Heaven, because some *Clergymen* have no mind to go there.

The Prophet *Isaiah* instructs us how we ought to *fast*, in reproving the manner of the Jewish Abstinence, *Isaiah* 58. 3, 4. is it such a Fast that I have chosen; is it to bow down the Head as a Bulrush, and to spread Sackcloth and Ashes under him? wilt thou call this a Fast and an acceptable day to the Lord? is not this the Fast that I have chosen? to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free? is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy House; when thou seest the naked that thou cloth him, and that thou hide not thy self from thine own flesh.

To this Abstinence (as is meet and requisite at this time) let us joyn an honest confession of our sins; which our Church prescribes to be done by the rule of Gods Commandments.

Let us therefore reflect upon our past lives, and charge our Memories, so officious in other things, to recollect our sins with their aggravating circumstances; as first against the first Table.

*I am the Lord thy God, thou shalt have none other Gods before me.*

Thou

Thou hast not in obedience to this Precept loved God above all things; but hast loved thy self and thy own wretched *Interest* above all things. Nay, thou hast never regarded any man, further than thou thought' st him in some measure capable to serve or to hurt thee in that point. Thou hast serv'd God more out of fear or respect to thy Reputation than love or gratitude to him. Thou hast not in thy adversity put thy trust in God; and in thy prosperity hast too much presumed on his Goodness.

*The second Commandment, Thou shalt not make to thy self any graven Image, &c.*

Thou hast hated the Idolatry of bowing before a *Crucifix* or *Picture* of thy Saviour; but not that of sacrificing all to thy worldly Interest, thy Pleasures or Avarice, which the Scripture calls Idolatry, *Col. 3. 5*.

*The third, Thou shalt not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain, &c.*

Thou hast taken his Name in vain by perjury or idle swearing: thou hast broken thy Vows and Promises which thou madest to God.

*The fourth, Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath day, &c.*

Thou hast not kept the Lords day and other holy



holy days by giving attendance to his publique Service, or behaving thy self reverently in the House of God.

Also against the second *Table* thou hast sinned, not so loving thy Neighbour as thy self, that thou hast seldom thought of doing to others as thou wouldst be done unto.

*Honour thy Father and thy Mother, &c.*

Thou hast not been so obedient or serviceable to thy natural Parents as thou oughtst to have been; and against thy civil Parents, the *King* and Royal Family, thou hast been guilty of seditious words and thought; meddling too much with them that are given to *change*. As for thy *spiritual* Parents, to say nothing of personal distasts, which are hard to be avoided, where the *Superior* is a proud or insolent or peevish person; proud to his Inferiors, *timorous* and obliging towards his Equals and Superiors: but thou hast maliciously bent thy self against the whole *Order*, for the introducing of *Confusion* and *Anarchy* into the *Church*.

Likewise against the *Sixth Commandment* thou hast offended many ways.

Thou hast murdered thy *Adversary* with thy *Heart* and *Tongue*, though not with thy *Hands*:

or

or

or thou hast dealt unmercifully with thy Neighbour, not relieving his necessities when it was in thy power to do it. Thou hast rejoyced at other mens misfortunes.

*The seventh Commandment, Thou shalt not commit*

*Adultery.* Thou hast made it thy business to corrupt thy Neighbours Wife or thy Neighbours Husband.

*The eighth, Thou shalt not steal.*

Thou hast purloined thy Neighbours Goods; which thou hast never yet restored; or circumvented him in his just pretences.

*The ninth, Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy Neighbour.*

Thou hast often accused him out of envy, hatred or malice: thou hast loved to speak all words that might do him hurt: thou hast been too apt to receive and propagate ill Reports of him, not knowing whether such Reports were true or false.

*The tenth, Thou shalt not covet thy Neighbours*

*House, thou shalt not covet thy Neighbours*

*Wife, &c.*

Thou hast entertained dishonest and unchaste thoughts, running into the occasions thereof, as

Drunkennes, Intemperance, idle Company, &c.

Thou

Thou hast covered thy Neighbors Goods, Means or Fortune, and envied his Reputation : in all these things thou hast flattered thy self, not regarding the All-seeing eye of God, so thou mightest escape the notice of men.

Thus if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins ; but the *Scripture* adds another necessary word, *he that confesses and forsakes his sins shall find mercy*, Prov. 28. plainly admonishing us of the vast mistake of that Confession or Sorrow for sin, that never produces any alteration of the Man, nor Fruits meet for Repentance.

And thus I do not reckon *Abstinence* as any virtue considered by it self alone ; only I say that we cannot serve God and our own Appetites at once.

To fare deliciously every day, remitting nothing of our wonted *Satisfactions*, argues but slight apprehensions or a dead faith of the last Judgment ; and of that Account which every man must render of all his thoughts, words and actions. You may observe the Prophet Daniels practice, Daniel 10. 2. *In those days I Daniel was mourning three whole weeks ; I ate no pleasant Bread, neither came Flesh nor Wine into my mouth ; neither did I anoint my self at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled : and this he did without any command that we read of*

To

To conclude all with a word or two. I have been hitherto exhorting to Abstinence and Confession of Sins. Give me leave also to mind you of *Alms-deeds*; for these must go together. True Charity will oblige you to remember not only the mendicant poor; but also those poor, whether Widows or Families that have lived in plenty and are ashamed to beg; and let your Charity in this be as secret as possible and thank God that he has given you the opportunity and ability to do it.

For a Gentleman to be able to find Mony for his needless and impertinent Debauches, and none for the Relief of a poor Family, is an Objection that he can never answer at the last Judgment.

To all this let us add a vigilance over our selves for the time to come; let us watch and pray that we fall not into the snare of the Devil when tempted by him. 2. Let the time past of our lives suffice to have wrought the will of the Flesh.

There be two sorts of Sins against which our blessed Saviour commands us to watch, that the day of the Lord surprise us not; first Surfeiting and Drunkenness, that is, the pleasures of the Flesh. 2ly. The Cares of the World.

Of these grand enemies, which war against our  
Soul,

Soul, it concerns us to be apprehensive; and to pray to God diligently to deliver us from all the deceits of the Flesh, and from all the deceits of the World; that is, from all the flattering vain opinions of our wordly Interest or Dignity.

Blessed is the man who has the Grace and Wit to despise the fallacious and flattering enjoyments of the World; *looking not at the things which are seen; but at the things which are not seen; for the things that are seen are temporal; but the things that are not seen are eternal.*

For a Gentleman to be able to understand his needs and imperinent Debatches, and none for the Relief of a poor Family, is an Objection that he can never answer at the last Judgment.

To all this let us add a vigilance over our selves to the time to come; let us watch and pray that we fall not into the snare of the Devil, which is contrived by him. **FINIS.** suffice to have wrought the will of the Flesh.

There be two sorts of sins against which our blessed Saviour commands us to watch; that the Div of the Lord might be not; and sinning and Drunkenness; that is the pleasures of the Flesh. *say The Cures of the World.* Of this grand command which we have in our Soul.